

This evening we meditate upon the Word of God recorded for us in the letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians, chapter 6, verse 12. **For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.** This is the Word of the Lord. Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen. Dear brothers and sisters watching the Son of God go forth to war for us,

When you Google something, you only search about 4 percent of everything out there in cyberspace. Something called the deep web has the other 96 percent—all of which is hidden to most people. What's out there? Some technical stuff, some military stuff, as well as secret, forbidden communications and more. The really scary thing is that there is another hidden part of the deep web, called the dark web, where you can find stolen credit card numbers for sale, mail order marijuana, killers for hire, sex trafficking, medical experiments on people, illegal betting, and worse. It would send chills up your spine!

When God tells us there is a darkness to this world, he includes SOMEONE in that darkness—an enemy who is both invisible and evil. We are in a struggle with this darkness. We should not enter the battle without knowing something about the enemy. Let's **look at God's reconnaissance report: we ought to know our enemy because we are facing off against the ruler of darkness.**

If a thug jumps you on the street or invades your home, you will defend yourself. You have a real person to deal with, somebody you can see and strike. But listen to St. Paul's chilling words. **"Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms"**. Our biggest battle is with an invisible, mysterious, sinister, evil force. St. Paul urges us to use God's armor, especially his Word, because we are facing a huge, lifelong struggle—if we were to lose, it would result in eternal death and damnation.

We face a very dangerous, very real enemy. We're talking about the devil and demons, which are all evil and real angels, 100 percent on the dark side. As unrepentant followers of Satan, the goal of demons is to destroy us and everyone else—our faith, our life, our hope, and our soul. There is nothing fascinating or attractive or funny about Satan, whose very name means "enemy."

Paul's references to rulers, authorities, and powers indicate that the evil angels are organized like an army with leaders and soldiers who follow Satan. He is the head general, authority, and power. We call them demons because there must be no confusion. Millions of angels are still in heaven and around us here on earth, always working for our good. But the demons bring spiritual darkness with them that can smother our souls like one of those blankets firemen use to cover a person engulfed in flames.

The goal of all demons is to remove saving faith from the earth—to separate it from you and me and to prevent unbelievers from hearing about God’s grace for them. That’s what spiritual darkness is—separation from our Savior. It’s living a normal life on the outside but having a dead soul inside. It’s being dead to God. No desire for him. No love for him. No faith in him. Satan hates you. He is actively waging war on you. The devil wants your soul to be dead so that you end up dead eternally.

God’s reconnaissance report compares our enemy to a hungry wild beast. The apostle Peter said it like this: “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour”. It’s startling to see this picture because it means this dark world is alive, it’s evil, and it’s on the prowl! If we have friends or family members who are his victims right now, it’s time for us to get serious in this battle. Let’s find ways to start conversations about the hope we have in Jesus. And let’s pray for them, but also for ourselves, because God tells us in his **reconnaissance report: we are caught in this battle with a liar.**

At some point in your life, somebody lied to you. You are more careful now when people make promises, right? That’s sad, because if someone is not honest, we know we can’t trust that person. Jesus told the Jewish people who were plotting to kill him about who was behind their dark plot: “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies”. Jesus knew Satan has the blackest, vilest, most deceitful heart. He is a hater of God, and he hates you and me. He even wants to murder us eternally in hell, where the screaming will never stop.

Whatever your native language is, you use it every day. Satan’s native language is lying. He uses it all the time. All he wants is to hurt, damage, and destroy. The name devil means “slanderer; one who brings charges with hostile intent.” He’s angry and jealous of what God has given us in Jesus. He works hardest at getting us to doubt or question God’s Word. He especially encourages us not to read or study it. That’s why we have Bible classes here: to keep him off balance.

He likes to use two favorite and effective lies. First, he tells you that you are such a good person that you don’t need Jesus because God could never damn you to hell. The second lie is just the opposite but no less effective. He will tell you that you are so bad that not even God would ever want you. Both are lies. The devil wants us to believe that God is not fair and doesn’t care about you or me. He wants us to get deeper into his darkness: to be angry at God, to reject God’s promises, and to hate God. He wants you to abandon God’s Word so that you will be totally, spiritually dark and dead. That’s why the Son of God went forth to war! It’s not hopeless. Our reconnaissance report for battle includes a clear report on what God has done for us: he has put a . . . **Light in the darkness.**

We turned the lights on for worship tonight. And light always defeats darkness! Even a small candle pushes back the darkness of a big cave. But another light shines here, far more powerful than the bulbs above our heads! That light led you here. That light has pushed away the very darkness that Satan has tried to shove into your heart. That light has given you hope and faith and a future in heaven so bright that the Bible describes us as no longer needing the sun or moon for light for eternity! St. John is talking about Jesus when he says, "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it".

Did you catch the battle in that verse? "Darkness has not overcome it." Our hero, Jesus, fought against our dark enemy Satan many times, as we find it recorded on the pages of the New Testament. Most of the time, Jesus used his Word to defeat Satan. Sometimes he used miracles to undo the damage of illness and death that Satan had caused. In the *Star Wars* movies, Luke Skywalker defeats the evil Darth Vader in a battle of light sabers. In real life, both Jesus and Satan used the cross as their war weapon. Satan thought he had beaten Jesus when Jesus died on the cross. Of course, we know that Jesus used the cross as his ultimate weapon to beat all the forces of darkness—the devil, the world, our sinful flesh, and death itself. Satan is defeated eternally, but like a cornered terrorist, he wants to take as many of us as possible with him to hell.

Thank God that you and I have been given the wonderful gift of faith in Jesus. Through that faith we see Jesus for who he really is—the Savior of the world who brings forgiveness and freely gives eternal life to those who believe in him: "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind". I can't see anything when I'm in the dark, so I need my flashlight to walk around without smashing into something. But it's much worse for those who do not trust in Jesus, because they are existing in spiritual darkness. There's only one flashlight for that kind of darkness, and it is Jesus. Jesus is life, the source of all light and life.

Our vision is precious to us. Our mothers always warned about poking out an eye. Jesus once healed a man who had been born blind. After Jesus had healed him, he came home seeing and, even under fierce questioning by those who hated Jesus, kept saying the same thing: "One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" As wonderful as that sight is, to come out of spiritual blindness and darkness into the light is infinitely better. It means that I can be totally honest with myself and admit the mess of my life. I see what sin really is and how much damage it does to me and others. I see why God hates it so much because it damns. I confess it freely to my Lord and trust him to forgive every last evil thought, word, and deed, because I see HIM! He's the Light of my life, the one who has bought and paid for me with his own life! He has shown me what grace is. He has opened my eyes to see all God has done for me because he loves me.

I see the grand purpose of life: to live in gratitude and grace, to be the best I can be for him who died for me! I live not for my glory, but his! I look at my family members as precious blood-bought souls whose lives are extremely important because I desire to live with them in eternity! Whatever I can do to help them grow in Jesus is what I want to do. I look at unbelievers not with disgust and anger, but with sadness and great desire to do all I can to help them see. I look at work as a means of giving God glory. I look at you, fellow believers, as special friends in Jesus, and I love and appreciate you all and pray for you because you matter to me.

And because of Jesus, I can see through death into eternity, where there is a real place alongside millions of fellow believers like my family and all of you, where we'll be with Jesus forever in a life filled with so much wonder and beauty and joy and love and action that is far beyond my wildest dreams. Oh, this light is so amazing! Amen.